
Preparation of California Public High School Graduates for College, 1994 to 1997

A CALIFORNIA POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION FACT SHEET

As the number of California high school graduates continues to rise over the next ten to fifteen years, demand for postsecondary education is expected to expand as well. But it is not only the increase in numbers of graduates that will challenge postsecondary education but also their changing social, cultural, and academic characteristics and the expectations that they bring to our colleges and universities. This fact sheet focuses on changes in the academic characteristics of recent high school graduates, particularly those that relate directly to university eligibility.

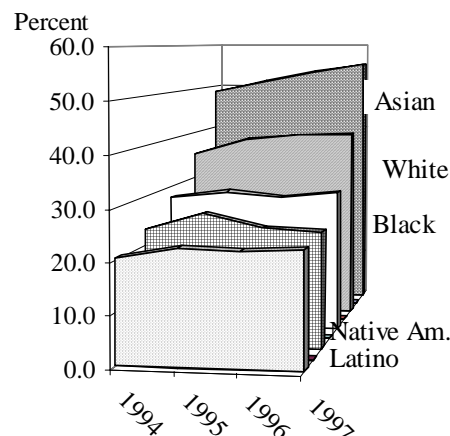
College preparatory curriculum

The freshman admission criteria of the California State University and the University of California require applicants to complete nearly identical college preparatory curricula. Since 1994, public high schools have reported annually the proportion of graduates who complete the full set of university required courses with a grade of “C” or better. While the number of public high school graduates grew by 6.3 percent since 1994, the proportion completing this curricula increased by 17 percent – from 32.3 percent in 1994 to 36.0 percent in 1997. The proportion of graduates completing this curriculum increased among students from all racial-ethnic groups, but their participation rates varied substantially, as Display 1 illustrates. In 1997, 55 percent of Asian graduates and 40 percent of White graduates completed these courses, while only 29 percent of Black graduates and 23 percent of Native American and Latino graduates did so.

Advanced Placement participation

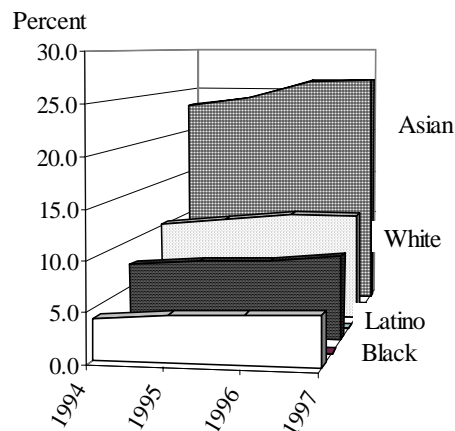
Another indicator of changes in the preparation level of students for college is the increasing number and proportion of California public high school twelfth graders who are taking Advanced Placement (AP) tests. Success on these examinations – earning a

DISPLAY 1 Proportion of Public High School Graduates Completing a College Preparatory Curriculum, 1994 to 1997



score of “3” or better – may qualify the student for actual college credit. Since 1994, the proportion of these students taking AP examinations has grown from 12.0 to 13.7 percent. While participation in these AP program increased among students from all racial-ethnic groups, large disparities persist in their rates of participation, as Display 2 shows. In 1997, the participation rates of Asian and White twelfth graders remained unchanged from the previous year at 26.2

DISPLAY 2 Proportion of California Public High School Twelfth Graders in Advanced Placement Examinations, 1994 to 1997



and 11.5 percent, respectively, while the rates for Black twelfth graders grew from 4.8 to 5.1 percent and those of Latino twelfth graders increased from 8.1 to 8.7 percent.

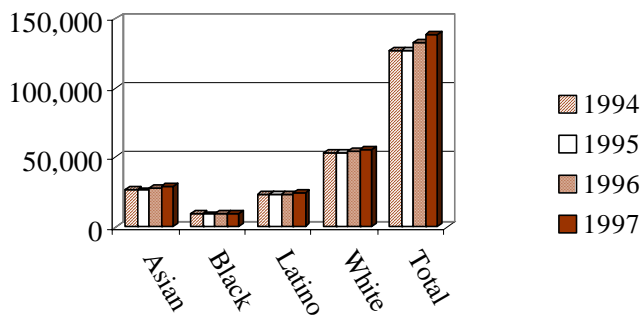
Participation and performance on college admissions tests

California public universities require many, if not all, freshman applicants to submit scores on standardized college admission tests – the SAT I and the ACT. The number of all California high school graduates taking these examinations continued its long-term increasing trend. The growth in participation has been slightly greater than growth in the number of graduates, expanding the participation rate in the SAT from 45.8 percent in 1994 to 46.5 in 1997 and the participation rate in the ACT from 10.5 percent to 11.6 percent. Among those students who chose to state their racial-ethnic background, the largest relative increases in students taking the SAT oc-

curred among Asian and Latino students. Among those taking the ACT, the largest relative increases occurred among Asian and Black test takers, as Displays 3 and 4 indicate.

Despite the continued growth in the number of California students taking these college admission tests, the average scores on these examinations have remained relatively stable or improved. SAT Verbal scores have increased by seven points since 1994 and SAT Math scores have increased by eight points in California. During that same time, there was a six-point increase in Verbal scores and a five-point increase in Math scores nationally. The average ACT score for California students of 21.0 is the same as the national average. Men, on the average, earned higher scores than women on both SAT tests and the ACT. Not only do Asian and White test takers earn higher scores than Black and Latino test takers, but the differences in their scores is growing.

DISPLAY 3 *California SAT I Tests Takers, 1994 to 1997*



DISPLAY 4 *California ACT Test Takers, 1994 to 1997*

